

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 726

SO 016 528

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TITLE An Examination of the Presentation of Heroes and Heroines in Current (1974-1984) Secondary Level Social Studies Textbooks.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Sex Bias; *Social Studies; *Textbook Content; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Research; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Heroes

ABSTRACT

Thirty-one secondary level social studies textbooks, published between 1974 and 1984 were examined to determine the characteristics of those identified as heroes and heroines, the extent to which they were presented, and ways in which they were presented. Five institutional settings (family, religious, political, economics, and sports) and five significant trait characteristics (bravery, humanitarianism, entertainer, leadership, and "other") were utilized to categorize heroic acts and traits. Findings show that 65 percent of the textbooks did not use the term hero or heroine, nor were leaders dealt with in a value-specific framework. In contrast, a parallel examination of elementary level social studies textbooks showed a slight majority (52 percent) presented heroes and heroines with appropriate value and trait development. Although heroes and heroines were commonly political leaders and war heroes, heroes were most frequently placed in the humanitarian classification. However, most secondary social studies textbooks were narrow, if not limited, in their presentation of a variety of categories of heroes and heroines. An appendix lists the textbooks surveyed. (LH)

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ABSTRACT: An Examination of the Presentation of Heroes and Heroines
in Current (1974-1984) Secondary Level Social Studies Textbooks

The major objective of this study was to examine how selected social studies textbooks presented living and non-living heroes and heroines. Each textbook (31 of the leading Secondary level texts published 1974-1984) was examined to determine whether the concept of the hero/heroine was defined, and if that description met the criteria for inclusion. The five institutional settings and significant trait characteristics were utilized to categorize heroic acts and traits. The findings were that most secondary level social studies textbooks are narrow if not limited in the development of heroes and heroines.

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1985

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRESENTATION OF
HEROES AND HEROINES IN CURRENT (1974-1984)
SECONDARY LEVEL SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS

"We can't all be heroes because somebody
has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by."

Will Rogers

The primary focus of this study was to identify and classify heroes and heroines in the leading 31 secondary social studies textbooks published 1974-1984. Each textbook was examined to determine whether the concept of hero or heroine was defined, and if the heroic act was described sufficiently to meet our descriptive criteria for inclusion. Heroism is any achievement that is recognized as noble, courageous, or superior by one's community. It was decided initially to classify heroes and heroines (either living or non-living) according to the most widely accepted sociological framework, namely the structural-functional theory of society. Therefore they were identified and categorized in one of the following institutional settings: (1) Family, (2) Religion, (3) Political, (4) Economics and, (5) Social.

In this study the Family, Religion, Political and Economics were useable headings, but the Social setting was renamed to include Sports (athletic) achievements. In further refining the five categories, the first category, (1) Family was held to consist of family relationships and humanitarian acts. The second category, (2) Economics consisted of activities primarily identified as science, production, and banking. The third category (3) Political-Education Military revolved about activities of any level of government (federal, state and local). The fourth category, Religion centered on religious leaders or humane acts by members of society. Lastly, since education was combined with political, a fifth category of (5) Sports, including athletic and social achievements was utilized to round out the classification system.

Next, in order to more fully understand the heroic traits, heroes and heroines were placed into five additional classes. Each class represented a trait that helped to identify qualities of the heroic act. The following categories were selected: A. Bravery, B. Humanitarian, C. Entertainer, D. Leadership, and E. Other Skills. The following brief explanation should help clarify the trait classification system utilized.

Bravery consists of notable acts of courage. The brave person risks his or her life for the good of others. The humanitarian is a person who promotes human welfare and social reform and devotes time, energy and success to the improvement of the human life.

The entertainer who has a unique talent, creative or athletic skill reaches others through a public performance. Leadership which revolves about the mystical quality of charisma is the unique quality of being able to guide others towards a specific goal. Skill is the mastery of a specific occupation, craft or trade other than politics, athletics, and entertainment as related to a profession or job.

Background and Rationale

Mankind has always had heroes/heroines who have served as behavioral models for the members of society ranging from a Mom or Pop, to a "Superman" or "Wonderwoman."

In the current American literature the act of heroism has been re-defined. Eugene Jennings states: "Ours is an age without heroes."¹ The lack of modern-day heroes as well as the re-definition may be due in part to the news media which focuses upon the weaknesses as well as the strengths of newsworthy personalities.

Generally, the hero or heroine is one who has confronted a serious problem, difficulty, or conflict which challenges man's ideas and goals. Secondly, the individual has overcome that problem by a specific action employing the traits of strength, bravery, or nobility of purpose; contrastingly, the heroine is more likely to be recognized for humanitarian qualities of faithfulness, morality, kindness, and fortitude.

The hero's action usually goes beyond the commonplace daily behavior as he overcomes the normal constraints of time, place or circumstance. Thus the act of heroism depends upon the cultural context within which it arises. For example, George Washington is a hero in the American culture but not in the British culture. Generally, there are several key characteristics that may be defined within the heroic act. Anthony Hopkins analysed the hero in fiction and discovered the following characteristics: (1) The hero possesses exceptional natural vitality; (2) Society is inherently and massively repressive; (3) Despite increasing social pressure, the hero remains non-conforming; (4) The hero suffers defeat, destruction, death.² Two popular heroes possessing the above characteristics were Yossarian in Catch-22 and McMurphy in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. In the nineteenth century Thomas Carlyle perceived heroes to be the Great Men and leaders of their times. The heroic traits of the Great Men were as follows:

They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain... (They) have been the indispensable savior of his epoch; the lightning, without which the fuel would never burnout. The History of the World, I said already, was the Biography of Great Men.³

For Carlyle the question of whether the event creates the hero was clear; he perceived that historical events created the hero. Whether world

history would be different if Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Alexander the Great, Hitler, Mohammed, or Mao Tse-Tung had never been born is speculation. Similarly, Sidney Hook holds that the hero is limited in impact to a specific social situation.⁴ In some cases, the hero is capable of mastery of the event but in another situation, the social catastrophe or natural phenomenon is so tremendous that the situation overwhelms the potential hero. In contrast, during more propitious times, the individual is capable of mastering the situation. Marshall Fishwick is definitive on this point:

Heroes do not make history. They are not products of historical times. No combination of factors can fabricate a hero of the wrong man at the right moment, or the right man at the wrong moment. Only when there is a genuine need for a particular type, and when the qualifying candidate thinks and acts in the heroic manner is there a culmination.⁵

The Hero Reflects Cultural Values

Heroes reflect the culture, and what the culture values will determine the type of heroic act that is to be rewarded. From a sociological perspective, Emile Durkheim viewed the hero as an individual who came to lead and reflect the values and sentiments of the society in which he lived. For Durkheim the hero performed culturally significant heroic acts.⁶ Similarly, Max Weber, depicted the hero as embodying the quality of charisma. Charisma consists of the special talent which enables the individual to lead. That talent was especially evident in the form of leadership, which was evidenced in unusual signs, miracles, and specific acts of heroism. According to Weber, charisma was a very personal and unique talent that could lead to social or political change;⁷ moreover, charisma was so special that it was held to be a supernatural force. Today, in a modern sense the bureaucratic leader possesses a degree of leadership as evidenced in the decision-making process. More recently,

Ernest Lewy analysed the powers possessed by many charismatic leaders such as Malcolm X, Frederick the Great, Zulu King Shaka, Gandhi, etc.⁸

While there are few heroes and heroines that cut across cultural boundaries, Western civilization depicts Julius Caesar and Joan of Arc as two universal heroes and there are more modern world reknown examples such as Gandhi, Schweitzer, Churchill, and Curie. A contemporary living cultural hero has been Lech Walesa, the Polish shipyard electrician and labor leader, who received a Nobel Peace Prize which helped legitimize his world stature. But typically, a Walesa would be only a national hero because his leadership and impact is limited to a single national boundary since the non-violent solidarity movement has not spread to other communist countries.

Usually the specific historical needs and special conditions of a nation will give rise to a mythology and morality for its heroes and heroines. If the qualities of fearlessness, courage, and bravery are essential to a nation's survival, then a Hercules, David, Washington or Caesar will be perceived as the culturally desirable role-model for fulfilling one's citizenship obligation, duty, and responsibility. Thus in a very integrative manner, heroes and heroines become an essential part of the moral faoric that each society weaves. Into that societal fabric is woven its past, present, and future.

Heroes in Secondary Social Studies Textbooks, 1974-1984

Thirty-one secondary level social studies textbooks copyrights 1974-1984, were examined to determine the characteristics of those identified as heroes. In order for an individual to be classified as a hero/heroine. the textual material had to first illustrate how that individual engaged in a heroic action; then, the individual was accredited with accomplishing

a specific action. Finally, the individual was categorized as a hero or heroine because of action involved, usually described in value-laden terms like great, heroic, courageous, god-like, brave, etc. Twenty of the textbooks (65 percent) did not utilize the term hero or heroine nor were leaders dealt with from a value-specific framework. Eleven textbooks (35 percent) had one or more heroes. Of the eleven, only four textbooks (Bidna, Millstein, Peek and Van Steeg) cited four or more specific heroes-heroines and described their traits. Constrastingly, in a parallel examination of elementary level social studies textbooks, a slight majority of them, or eleven (52 percent) of twenty-one textbooks presented heroes and heroines with appropriate value and trait development. As matter of fact, the Jack and Louis Abramowitz textbook, The U.S.: People and Leaders focused upon a multitude of leaders that fully covered the five institutional settings. For example, in Science, Salk, Sabin and Yalow were discussed; in Education, probably the most neglected institutional setting, Horace Mann was described; in Religion, King de las Casas, and Anne Hutchins were presented; and in Politics the focus was on La Guardia, Rodino, Chisholm, Chief Pontiac, et. al. The best of the secondary level textbooks was that of Ira Peek et.al. American Adventures which had fourteen heroes and heroines each fully developed in terms of personality, heroic quality, and specific contributions. Three other secondary level social studies textbooks (Bidna, We The People, Millstein, We, The American Women and Van Steeg, The American Spirit) presented four or more heroes-heroines. Seven other textbooks utilized a hero or heroine solely once or twice. (Table 1.)

A second dimension of the analysis was to categorize the manner in which the hero and heroine displayed specific traits and values. The five fundamental classifications were: Category A, Arts, Science and Economics; Category B, Family and Humanitarian concerns; Category C,

TABLE 1.

Thirty-one Secondary Level Social Studies Textbooks, 1974-1984

No Heroes/Heroines		Cited Once/Twice	Cited Three Or More Times
Ahlquist	Kowstar	Annals (1)	Bidna (4)
Allen	Lefferts	Borg (2)	Millstein (6)
Brandwein	Lewinski	Branson (2)	Peek (14)
Chapin	Mazour	Roselle (1)	Vansteeg (7)
Cox	Ostrowski	Rosencranz (2)	
Glanzrock	Roselle/Young	Smith (1)	
Gross	Steege	Wiltz (1)	
Hale	Todd		
Jantzen	Weinstein		
Julian	Wilder		
TOTAL	20	7	4

Political and Adventure; Category D, Religion; and, Category E, Sports and Sportsmanship. These categories were selected because they covered a full range of human behaviors that reflected the values and traits likely to be found in the five institutional settings.

As was expected, a commonly described hero and heroine was the political leader. Since war occupies one out of each seven years of American history, the political leader was frequently a war hero. Similarly, many of the acts

of adventure and exploration took place in a political context.

Yet, the most frequently cited hero-heroine was the humanitarian leader or the family person who was likely to sacrifice his life for the survival of others.

The remaining categories of heroes and heroines were seldom depicted in the textbooks. Consequently, the Arts, Sciences, field of Economics, Religion, and Sports, tended to receive minimal coverage. (Table 2.)

The third dimension of the analysis was to examine characteristics, especially traits, that were the basis of the heroic act. The four most frequently utilized categories were (A) Patriotism in the political realm consisting of acts of courage, strength, or bravery. The second category was (B) Humanitarian acts which consisted of helping, caring, and being kind to others. Third was (C) Special Talent in the aesthetic fields as well as the hard-work, industriousness or self-determination essential to achieve success in a professional field. Fourth, (D) Leadership consisting of the ability to successfully lead others towards a goal. There was a parallel emphasis of traits that followed the manner in which heroes and heroines were classified. For example, heroes were most frequently placed in the Family and Humanitarian classification and the modal heroic characteristic for textual presentation was in the Humanitarian category. (Table 3.)

Discussion

Analysis leads us to believe that most secondary level social studies textbooks are narrow if not limited in their presentation of a variety of categories of heroes and heroines. In most cases the concept of hero and heroine is presented infrequently and the full development of the hero/heroine characteristics was the exception rather than the norm. The

TABLE 2.

Five Classifications of Heroes and Heroines

Textbook	A. Arts, Science Economics	B. Family & Humanitarian Concerns	C. Political & Adventure	D. Religion	E. Sports
Duskin	--	--	1	--	--
Bidna	--	--	3	--	2
Branson	--	--	2	--	--
Borg	2	--	--	--	--
Millstein	--	7	--	--	--
Peek	--	9	5	--	--
Roselle	--	--	1	--	--
Rosencranz	--	--	2	--	--
Smith	--	1	--	--	--
Van Steeg	--	6	--	--	--
Wiltz	--	--	1	--	--
TOTAL CITATIONS	2	23	15	0	2

TABLE 3.

Four Categories of Leading Characteristics of Heroes and Heroines as Presented in Eleven Secondary-Level Social Studies Textbooks

Textbook	A. Patriotism	B. Humanitarianism	C. Talent	D. Leadership
Duskin	--	1	--	--
Bidna	1	1	2	2
Branson	2	--	--	--
Borg	--	--	2	--
Millstein	4	2	--	1
Peek	1	5	3	3
Roselle	--	2	--	1
Rosencranz	--	--	2	--
Smith	1	1	--	--
Van Steeg	2	4	--	--
Wiltz	1	--	1	1
TOTAL CITATIONS	12	16	10	8

concept of hero-heroine typically was not utilized to illustrate those values and ideals necessary for the maintenance of a democratic society, nor were those concepts utilized in a manner which enabled the student to better grasp democratic ideals and help to focus upon the intimate relationships between mankind and his institutions. It would be beneficial if the values of society could be presented, explained and integrated into the social context by focusing upon the hero and heroine. This study revealed that usually such was not the case.

Recommendations

The social studies teacher has the responsibility for examining democratic values in relationship to people and their institutions. The heroes and heroines of the past as well as the present can become a foundation for selecting, analysing, and promoting a democratic philosophy. Since social studies curriculum has the primary task of promoting effective citizenship, the presentation of democratic values requires a clear conceptualization of where we came from, where we are, and where we wish to go. Universal values need to be identified, examined, and incorporated into the social studies program. To a very great extent textbooks provide the perimeter for the classroom teacher, therefore, it is absolutely critical that a comprehensive and balanced use of heroes and heroic traits be presented as an effective vehicle for promoting the democratic way of life.

Footnotes

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APPENDIX A

SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS SURVEYED, 1974-1984 COPYRIGHTS

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